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COUNTERING TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME (CTOC)

CORRUPTION

Explainer: How the UN is promoting a ‘global commitment to fight corruption’
United Nations News: 8 December 2023
Countries across the world need to work together, according to the head of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Ukraine Battles Corruption Through Smartphone App
Leo Chiu – Kyiv Post: 8 December 2023
Ukraine is one of Eastern Europe’s leading tech hubs, and that expertise is now taking the fight to the frontline against corruption.
https://www.kyivpost.com/post/25193

For more on this theme:

Prosecutions coupled with zero-tolerance culture key to fighting SA’s corruption scourge
https://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/prosecutions-coupled-with-zero-tolerance-culture-key-to-fighting-corruption-2023-11-24

Fighting corruption globally through digitalization

Corruption can increase environmental efficiency and improve economy in developing countries, study argues

Russia: Sabotage, Incompetence and Corruption in Russia

How anti-corruption efforts strengthen global democracy and security
https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-anti-corruption-efforts-strengthen-global-democracy-and-security/

Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption drive worked wonders on his bureaucrats’ waistlines
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/dec/03/xi-jinping-anti-corruption-drive-has-worked-wonders-for-bureaucrats-waistlines

Corruption and crime: Measuring the links
https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/corruption-crime-ocindex/

The Qatargate Files: Hundreds of leaked documents reveal scale of EU corruption scandal

Lombok sand mine corruption probe continues as Indonesia to resume exports
DRUG TRAFFICKING

Drug lords go on killing spree to hunt down corrupt officers who stole shipment in Mexico’s Tijuana
Mark Stevenson – The Associated Press: 10 December 2023
Two officers suspected of theft have been killed, prosecutors say, along with at least three others.
https://apnews.com/article/mexico-tijuana-drug-theft-officers-killed-9d4102b8b55f7e4f2c-691c6c05056765

Civil-War-Torn Myanmar Surpasses Afghanistan as World’s Top Opium Producer
Grant Peck – Time: 12 December 2023
The country, already wracked by a brutal civil war, has regained the unenviable title, according to a United Nations agency report.
https://time.com/6358170/myanmar-opium-production-afghanistan/

For more on this theme:
Former El Chapo associate shares insider tips with US law enforcement
https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/former-el-chapo-associate-shares-insider-tips-with-us-law-enforcement-2023-12-06/

Disputes Over Drug Trafficking Routes Drive Child Recruitment in Ecuador

Coca in Honduras: Cultivating and Consuming Fear

30 Years After Escobar, How the Cocaine Trade Has Changed
https://insightcrime.org/news/30-years-after-escobar-how-the-cocaine-trade-has-changed/

His job was to secure boats for drug trafficking shipments. Now he’s a convicted felon

Organized crime in Brazil’s Amazon threatens the fight against climate change

Treasury announces Counter-Fentanyl Strike Force, led by anti-terrorism office, to fight spread of deadly drug

When Cocaine Comes to Paradise
https://insightcrime.org/investigations/when-cocaine-comes-paradise-moskitia-honduras/

U.S. Border Patrol is using AI to crack down on fentanyl trafficking
https://www.axios.com/2023/12/07/fentanyl-trafficking-ai-border-patrol

Europol’s 7th European Annual Drugs Conference
TRAFFICKING IN SCARCE OR PROTECTED RESOURCES

$20,000 monkeys: inside the booming illicit trade for lab animals
Phoebe Weston – The Guardian: 7 December 2023

A lucrative underground risks undermining research, creating new pandemics and pushing a recently abundant species to the brink.


Crimes against the Climate: Violence and Deforestation in the Amazon
International Crisis Group: 8 December 2023

Organized crime has infiltrated the Amazon basin, seeking land for growing coca, rivers for drug trafficking and veins of gold underground. These groups are endangering the rainforest and the safety of those attempting to defend it.


For more on this theme:

500 arrested in global crackdown on illegal wildlife trade

European Union mulling crackdown on Chinese exports

What are NDFs? A vital tool for the future of sustainable trade in wild species
https://www.traffic.org/news/what-are-ndfs/

Chinese gold miners ‘illegally’ tearing up Cambodian wildlife sanctuary

Colombia, Brazil destroy illegal gold dredges in Amazon rainforest
https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/colombia-brazil-destroy-illegal-gold-dredges-amazon-rainforest-2023-12-06/

Peru’s deadly gold mine attack highlights growing security risk, costs

Peru’s crackdown on illegal gold mining a success, but only briefly, study shows
https://news.mongabay.com/2023/12/perus-crackdown-on-illegal-gold-mining-a-success-but-only-briefly-study-shows/

Bosnians Living Near Coal Mines Fear Illegal Digging, Landslides

Coast Guard Pacific partnerships push back against illegal fishing
https://www.brookings.edu/articles/coast-guard-pacific-partnerships-push-back-against-illegal-fishing/
PROGRAM ON CYBER SECURITY STUDIES (PCSS)

INTERNET GOVERNANCE

Ian Klaus and Ben Polsky – Carnegie: 12 December 2023
Such jurisdictions are grappling with the tangible impacts of AI. Their efforts provide an important space to learn best practices for policy going forward.

For more on this theme:
(Asia) Everyone wins with better Asian AI governance
https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2023/12/03/everyone-wins-with-better-asian-ai-governance/
(China) China’s short-sighted AI regulation
(Ukraine) Ukraine’s AI road map seeks to balance innovation and security
(EU) Landmark AI Deal: Will Europe Succeed as the World’s Digital Regulator?

INTERNET FREEDOM

The AI Assault on Women: What Iran’s Tech Enabled Morality Laws Indicate for Women’s Rights Movements
Rachel George – Council on Foreign Affairs: 7 December 2023
Iran and other countries in the Middle East are increasingly using artificial intelligence as a tool to crack down on women. International standards need to address the impacts of technology on such repression.

For more on this theme:
(India) Internet out: India deploys shutdowns in name of security
(Indonesia) Indonesia softens internet law after critics complain of misuse
(Guinea) Radios jammed, social media blocked in latest threat to media freedom in Guinea
CYBER STRATEGY AND RISKS

Australia needs to talk more openly about offensive cyber operations
Ben Scott – The Strategist: 8 December 2023

Australia’s 2023 cybersecurity strategy makes clear that most of the things we need to do to protect ourselves in cyberspace are essentially defensive.

For more on this theme:

(Global) To Beat China and Russia in Cyberspace, Change the Game

(EU) EU Takes Cyber Defense to the Next Level with Cyber Solidarity Act

(Global) UK and allies expose Russian intelligence services for cyber campaign of attempted political interference

(Greece) Greece Moves to Enhance Cyber Security Amid Frequent Attacks

CYBER CAPACITY BUILDING

The Impact of Improved Internet Access in Somalia
Any Uak Media: 10 December 2023

Increased availability and reliability of internet services have revolutionized communication, education, business and governance, transforming the lives of citizens.

For more on this theme:

(Global) “Hacking” the cybersecurity skills gap in developing countries

(Qatar) Qatar Cyber Agency Runs National Cyber Drills

(U.S.) DoD Officials Consider Creating Central Cyber Workforce Program Office
CYBERCRIME

Microsoft seizes infrastructure of top cybercrime group
AJ Vicens – Cyber Scoop: 13 December 2023

Relying on a court order, the tech giant seized websites belonging to a top purveyor of fraudulent accounts.
https://cyberscoop.com/microsoft-seizes-infrastructure-of-top-cybercrime-group/

For more on this theme:

(Global) Newest UN cybercrime treaty draft slammed

(Global) New cybercrime market ‘OLVX’ gains popularity among hackers

(Global) Cybercrime Orgs Increasingly Use Human Trafficking to Staff Scam Mills

(Australia) Australia’s cybercrime surge: Expert warns investors and companies to prioritise security

PROTECTION OF CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Iran-Linked ‘OilRig’ Cyberattackers Target Israel’s Critical Infrastructure, Over & Over
Elizabeth Montalbano – Dark Reading: 14 December 2023

The prolific APT repeatedly compromised targets in healthcare, manufacturing and government with new downloaders that blend into network traffic for evasion.

For more on this theme:

(China, U.S.) China’s Hackers Are Expanding Their Strategic Objectives
https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/china-s-hackers-are-expanding-their-strategic-objectives

(Ireland) Cyberattack on Irish Utility Cuts Off Water Supply for Two Days
https://www.securityweek.com/cyberattack-on-irish-utility-cuts-off-water-supply-for-two-days/

(Germany) LockBit Ransomware Adds German Energy Agency Dena to its Victim List
https://thecyberexpress.com/german-energy-agency-dena-cyberattack/

(U.S., China) Report: Chinese hackers targeted Texas power grid, Hawaii water utility, other critical infrastructure
PROGRAM ON TERRORISM AND SECURITY STUDIES (PTSS)

TERRORISM AROUND THE WORLD

Exploit and Evade to Remain and Expand: The Cross-Platform Evasion Toolbox of Islamic State Supporters
Moustafa Ayad – Global Network on Extremism and Technology: 13 December 2023

“News outlets” are the next generation of tactics by Islamic State group supporters currently laundering official Islamic State group media for larger audiences.

For more on this theme:

EU Commissioner Warns Europe Over Huge Risk of Terrorist Attacks During Christmas Holidays Due to War Between Israel & Hamas

Britain to repatriate woman and five children from Syrian camps

Counter-terrorism police to be given more powers to retain biometrics

CSO Calls For Intelligence Gathering Against Terrorism Financing
https://leadership.ng/cso-calls-for-intelligence-gathering-against-terrorism-financing/

Telegram’s Bans on Extremist Channels Aren’t Really Bans
https://www.wired.com/story/telegram-hamas-channels-deplatform/

Rising Risk of Radicalization in Indonesia Following Outbreak of Israel-Hamas War

Radical Islamist Weaponized Drone Use I&W (Indications & Warning) in Africa:
A Terrorism Research Note

Afghan Insurgent Groups Step Up Attacks, Political Campaign Against Taliban

Do terrorist attacks and mass shootings make big companies more ‘honest’?
https://phys.org/news/2023-12-terrorist-mass-big-companies-honest.html

Iraq: UN team issues latest report on terrorist atrocities
TERRORISM AROUND THE WORLD

For more on this theme:

2023 Review of The Fund’s Anti-Money Laundering and Combating The Financing of Terrorism Strategy

ISIS propaganda seducing ‘new generation of teenagers,’ French domestic intel

ISIS abused girls as young as nine, UN says
https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/iraq/2023/12/05/isis-abused-girls-as-young-as-nine-un-says/

Meaningful Transparency for CVE: Process not Policy

Terror in Uganda: what’s driving the Islamic State-linked rebels

The Philippines is battling a resurgent Islamic State threat
https://www.japantimes.co.jp/commentary/2023/12/08/world/philippines-islamic-state-threat/

Taliban Reportedly Dismantled Islamic State Bases in Western Afghanistan

Can't Stand the Heat?: Best Practices and Institutional Responsibilities to Safeguard Extremism Researchers

IntelBrief: The Sahel Continues to Burn as the World Focuses Elsewhere
https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2023-december-13/

Sweden Shuts Down Publicly Funded School Over Jihad Links

Terrorism Hot Spots
https://geopoliticalfutures.com/terrorism-hot-spots/

Pakistan Seeks US Help Against Pakistani Taliban in Afghanistan

What the United States Should Do About the Terrorist Threat to Pakistan

Al Qaeda Saharan branch leader announces new Jihad phase against juntas
ISRAEL/HAMAS

What does the Israel-Hamas conflict mean for Africa?
Ronak Gopaldas and Menzi Ndhlovu – Institute for Security Studies: 12 December 2023

African countries must exercise economic prudence and geopolitical tact to minimize war-induced disruptions.

https://issafrica.org/iss-today/what-does-the-israel-hamas-conflict-mean-for-africa

For more on this theme:

Countering Hamas requires making life better for Palestinians, says retired US general Petraeus
https://www.straitstimes.com/world/countering-hamas-requires-making-life-better-for-palestinians-says-retired-us-general-petraeus

Is Hamas the same as ISIS, the Islamic State group? No – and yes
https://theconversation.com/is-hamas-the-same-as-isis-the-islamic-state-group-no-and-yes-219454

The Outlines of a Solution in Lebanon?
https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/91199

Petraeus says Israel should try U.S.-style counterinsurgency in Gaza

IntelBrief: Israel Turns Attention to Hezbollah Amid Northern Escalation
https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2023-december-12/

Does the Resistance Axis believe its propaganda about Israel? The October 7 attack seems to suggest so.
https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/resistance-axis-hamas-israel-iran-propaganda/

China is fixed on discrediting the US on Gaza War. But this policy lacks credibility and will likely fail.
https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/china-gaza-hamas-israel-war/

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry on the Israel-Hamas war and the future of the Middle East

The Order of Battle of Hamas' Izz al Din al Qassem Brigades, Part 1: North and Central Gaza

Hamas Wrought Destruction, But at What Price?
https://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2023-12-14/hamas-wrought-destruction-but-at-what-price

Missile Defense in the Israel-Hamas War
https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/missile-defense-in-the-israel-hamas-war
ISRAEL/HAMAS

For more on this theme:

The Resurgence of Armed Groups in the West Bank and Their Connections to Gaza

France to host meeting on tackling Hamas financing, online activities
https://whbl.com/2023/12/12/france-to-host-meeting-on-tackling-hamas-financing-online-activities/

Iran's 'Resistance Front' And Its Bridge With South Asia – Analysis

Israel-Palestine: Challenges to a Post-War Two-State Solution

Re-evaluating China’s Role in the Israel-Hamas Conflict: Objectives and Limitations

What's east Africa's position on the Israel-Hamas war? An expert unpacks the reactions of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda

With the Israel-Hamas war, Sunni and Shia armed groups find uncommon unity

Is Syria's al-Assad supporting Hamas for political gain or optics?

Lebanon’s Hezbollah faces moment of reckoning as Israel-Hamas war in Gaza enters its deadliest phase
https://www.arabnews.com/node/2425376/middle-east

Hamas, Terrorist Financing, and Cryptocurrency

Anti-Muslim Hate Surfaces Nationwide as Israel-Hamas War Continues
https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/anti-muslim-hate-surfaces-nationwide-israel-hamas-war-continues

Israel-Hamas Conflict Sparks Meta Oversight Board's First Emergency Case
https://www.wired.com/story/oversight-board-meta-israel-hamas/

Jordan Navigates Delicately Amid Israel-Hamas Conflict

Discrimination investigations mount against schools in the US amid Israel-Hamas war
ISRAEL/HAMAS

For more on this theme:

As the Israel-Hamas War Governs the World's Attention, Iran Is Quietly Marching Towards Nuclear Breakout
https://time.com/6344430/israel-hamas-war-iran-nuclear-breakout/

Israel-Hamas war may not restore Israelis’ support for military reserves
https://theconversation.com/israel-hamas-war-may-not.restore-israelis-support-for-military-reserves-218777

Australian Public Divided on Israel-Hamas War

Beyond Israel's propaganda, some signs Gazans are questioning Hamas

Analysis: Has the approach to tunnel warfare changed for Israel and Hamas?

What the war in Gaza means for Syria
https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2023/12/07/what-war-gaza-means-syria

Israel-Hamas War: Regional Ripple Effects
https://www.cfr.org/event/israel-hamas-war-regional-ripple-effects

Misinformation about the Israel-Hamas war often follows similar false narratives

Hamas’ use of sexual violence is an all-too-common part of modern war – but not in all conflicts

Does social media favor Palestine over Israel?

The Middle East and Ukraine: The rules of war depend on the nature of the conflict

Cyberint report explores digital dynamics of Israel-Hamas, Russia-Ukraine conflicts

Russia calls for international monitoring mission in Gaza
https://www.reuters.com/world/russias-lavrov-hamas-attacks-do-not-justify-israels-punishment-palestinians-2023-12-10/

How Russia uses the Israel-Gaza Crisis in its disinformation campaign against the West
ISRAEL/HAMAS

For more on this theme:
Unraveling the Multi-Faceted Impact of Armed Conflict on Women in the Gaza Strip
Israel-Hamas Symposium 2023 – Flooding Hamas Tunnels: A Legal Assessment
https://lieber.westpoint.edu/flooding-hamas-tunnels-legal-assessment/

RUSSIA/UKRAINE

An emboldened, confident Putin says there will be no peace in Ukraine until Russia’s goals are met
Amid battlefield gains and flagging Western support, President Vladimir Putin said his goals remain unchanged after nearly two years of fighting.
https://apnews.com/article/putin-russia-press-conference-moscow-ukraine-ef4e88fda50e6ad-75b8a1979b95d9fcc

For more on this theme:
Judy Asks: Is Europe Still Committed to Ukraine?
https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/91246
The Best Laid Plans: Putin’s Rogue Election Announcement
https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/91234
Closure of Russia-Finland Border Heralds End of Pragmatic Cooperation
https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/91227
Bureaucracy as the Pillar of Stability: Are There Any Real Institutions Inside the Russian Political Regime?
https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/91195
Ukraine’s ‘low return’ on its African investment
https://issafrica.org/iss-today/ukraines-low-return-on-its-african-investment
IntelBrief: Key Gulf States Help Putin Break out of Isolation
https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2023-december-11/
What does Putin want from the UAE and Saudi Arabia?
Rebuilding Resiliency: Kyiv’s Opportunity to Bolster its Defense
Russian influence and cyber operations adapt for long haul and exploit war fatigue
RUSSIA/UKRAINE

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Ukraine's European allies are letting it down

With an inconclusive counteroffensive, Ukraine looks toward an anxious winter
https://www.npr.org/2023/12/11/1216990973/russia-ukraine-war-counteroffensive-winter

U.S. Support for Ukraine 'Unshakable,' Says Austin
https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3613826/us-support-for-ukraine-unshakable-says-austin/

The Shortest Path to Victory in Ukraine Goes Through Crimea

US issues sweeping sanctions targeting Russia over Ukraine war
https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-issues-sweeping-sanctions-targeting-russia-over-ukraine-war-2023-12-12/

Should Ukraine’s Zelenskyy hold elections amid Russia war? No, say voters

Russia has lost 87% of troops it had prior to start of Ukraine war, according to US intelligence assessment

Life in Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine is grim. People are fleeing through a dangerous corridor
https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-refugees-escape-57549469b780f53ef226c909d25a08d5

Dismayed by Moscow’s war, Russian volunteers are joining Ukrainian ranks to fight Putin’s troops
https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-putin-volunteer-troops-014f24506a74161e-054b3947ef262873

‘They’re also learning’: Russia, Ukraine race to out-innovate each other
https://breakingdefense.com/2023/12/theyre-also-learning-russia-ukraine-race-to-out-innovate-each-other/

Russian hackers targeted NATO forces and diplomats to aid Ukraine war effort

In Ukraine, time is really not on Russia’s side
https://thehill.com/opinion/international/4356135-in-ukraine-time-is-not-on-russias-side/

Ukraine’s innovative edge counters Russian mass, official says
https://www.c4isrnet.com/battlefield-tech/2023/12/14/ukraines-innovative-edge-counters-russian-mass-official-says/
RUSSIA/UKRAINE

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**Ukraine/Russia: Children’s futures under attack as Russian aggression in Ukraine continues to restrict schooling**

**The quest for military superiority in Ukraine**
https://www.gisreportsonline.com/ukraine-military-superiority/

**Russia’s ethnic minorities disproportionately die in the war in Ukraine**
https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/russias-ethnic-minorities-disproportionately-conscripted-to-fight-the-war-in-ukraine

**Historic breakthrough for Ukraine as EU agrees to begin membership talks**

**Russia Risks Losing an Ally to Ukraine**
https://www.newsweek.com/russia-risks-losing-ally-ukraine-1852180

**Ukraine to launch “ecocide” case against Russia following dam destruction**
https://www.euronews.com/2023/12/05/ukraine-to-launch-ecocide-case-against-russia-following-dam-destruction

**Russia's invasion cannot derail Ukraine's rule of law reforms**

**Is There an Actionable Strategy for Ending the War in Ukraine?**
https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/there-actionable-strategy-ending-war-ukraine

**Ukraine Is Courting the Mideast and Africa in Spite of Russia’s Shadow**

**Coercion and Control: Ukraine’s Health Care System under Russian Occupation**

**Ukraine war: How TikTok fakes pushed Russian lies to millions**

**Behind the Lines: Lies, Damned Lies, and Logistics in Ukraine**

**Better News for NATO From Ukraine’s Battlefields**
https://cepa.org/article/better-news-for-nato-from-ukraines-battlefields/

**Pro-Putin Disinformation Warriors Take War of Aggression to Reddit**
https://cepa.org/article/pro-putin-disinformation-warriors-take-war-of-aggression-to-reddit/
RUSSIA/UKRAINE

For more on this theme:

Russia Cares About UN Rights Council, So Should We
https://cepa.org/article/russia-cares-about-un-rights-council-so-should-we/

Bombs and Ballot Papers — Ukraine's Dilemma
https://cepa.org/article/bombs-and-ballot-papers-ukraines-dilemma/

Russia's Putin tells soldiers: I will run for president again in 2024
https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-says-he-will-run-president-2024-tass-2023-12-08/

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Russia And Egypt: A Fast-Growing Partnership — Analysis

‘Forged documents’: how Ukrainian grain may be enriching Putin’s circle
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/11/forged-documents-how-ukrainian-grain-may-be-enriching-putins-circle

War in Ukraine Disrupts Russian Civilian and Commercial Aviation

Increased Russian-Iranian Defense Cooperation Poses Threat to Ukraine and the West
https://jamestown.org/program/increased-russian-iranian-defense-cooperation-poses-threat-to-ukraine-and-the-west/

Kremlin Plays a Dangerous Game in Ignoring Protests Against Front-Line Conditions
https://jamestown.org/program/kremlin-plays-a-dangerous-game-in-ignoring-protests-against-front-line-conditions/